

Get to Know Your Vendors at the USDA Winter Farmers Market

Each Wednesday, vendors travel to the South Building cafeteria to sell their products at the USDA Winter Farmers Market; AMS representatives recently caught up with the vendors to get to know a little more about these vendors and their products.

While the products the vendors sell varies, the one constant among all of them is their love for providing customers quality products. Many can sit and talk for hours about their products, providing their customers valuable information to help make informed decisions. After spending some time with them, you get a sense of the tremendous connection these vendors have with their customers. Some of the vendors even are on a first-name basis with their customers!

It is quite interesting to enter the tight-knit community of vendors. The shared experience of participating in these markets has created a number of lifetime friendships. In fact, **Velma Lakins**, agricultural marketing specialist, and coordinator of the Farmers Market, communicates with the vendors so much that she has all of them on her speed dial. She loves working with the vendors and considers them to be her extended family. Lakins laughs when she says, “We all better be close, considering we are always setting up their booths together in the 100 degree heat of the summer.”

This is the second go around for the Winter Farmers Market. The success of the Outdoor Market made the transition to a Winter Market easy. Lakins is pleased with the way things are going with this new market. “Last year we started out with five vendors and we are fortunate enough to have nine this year,” she says.

Citing successful campaigns like “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food (KYF2),” Lakins is glad the Department

has made a tremendous effort to support local producers. “The purpose of the USDA’s KYF2 Campaign is to make a connection between eating fresh, locally grown food and having a healthy diet,” says AMS Administrator **Rayne Pegg**. “Our goal is that as KYF2 evolves Americans will be more informed about where their food comes from and how it reaches their plates.”

By promoting accessibility to affordable, fresh food, which can be found at farmers markets, the USDA is trying to raise consumer awareness about pressing food and nutrition issues. “This market is another example of the USDA’s dedication to local producers,” Lakins says. “It gives these vendors an opportunity to share their products with their customers all year long, providing them a source of income even during the winter months,” she says. Lakins thanks all of her colleagues at the Transportation and Marketing Program for their help in making this market a success. Her goal is for the Winter Market to draw the same volume of customers the Outdoor Market does.

These vendors come from Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania to share their products with USDA employees and visitors. They are all pleased to impart their knowledge about their products with you. So the next time you visit the Farmers Market, stop and chat with these vendors for a little. You can catch them in the back of the cafeteria every Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. until March 31. You can get to know a little more about your USDA Farmers Market vendors in the next couple of pages.

You can find more information about the USDA Farmers Market at: www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/farmersmarkets. Information about the KYF2 campaign can be found at: www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer.





Grace Brock,
Ole Pioneer's Kitchen

Ole Pioneer's Kitchen specializes in selling processed meats. Grace Brock, the owner of the Vienna-based business, only uses the Boston Butt Pork Roast, or shoulder, in all of its products. Brock takes it back to the days before refrigeration, when meat was immediately smoked or cured after slaughter, by using this same cut of pork that was popular back then. She believes that this old-fashioned method is the best way to get fresh, natural tasting meat.

Encouraging customers to "eat fresh, healthy, local, and homemade," products from Ole Pioneer's Kitchen are free of fillers or preservatives and use natural casings to reduce the fat content. Only fresh spices are used to flavor the varieties of bacon, sausage, and meatball products. Brock also adds a personal touch to her business by processing and packaging all of her meats which come from farmers in Fauquier County, Va. She also sells homemade pastas and sauces to complement her meat products.

Dedicated to customer service, the Ole Pioneer's Kitchen

Website provides a list of all its products and their prices. Following its slogan, "from our kitchen to yours," Brock also offers recipes that she feels "bring out a burst of flavor" in her products. A recent expansion to the business allows customers to purchase products from Farmers Online Market. Ole Pioneer's Kitchen teamed up with this team of local farmers and producers to allow customers to buy products online and then pick up their purchases at designated locations. You can find out more about this program under the "events" section of the Ole Pioneer's Kitchen Website.

When speaking of the USDA Farmers Market, she would like to remind everyone how lucky they are to have great, home-grown products available to them right at their job. She believes it is important that customers receive quality products. "I take great pride in carefully selecting the meats and cutting out the fat in my products. I personally cut out the fat in my meats so that I know my customers are getting quality, healthy food."

To learn more about Ole Pioneer's Kitchen and the locations where they operate, visit their Website at www.opkfoods.com.



Nathan Whaley,
Union Street Soapworks

Nathan Whaley runs Union Street Soapworks with the help of his wife, Jen. The Whaleys use a hands-on approach to running his business. Nathan has a bent for informing consumers about the importance of using hand-made soaps when cleaning their bodies.

When visiting the Union Street Soapworks Website, you will see the interesting story behind Whaley's introduction to the soap world. This introduction came during a high school chemistry class where his soap was the only one that actually floated. The joy of soap never left Whaley, and he has been making soap ever since! Their Website also shares with its visitors their method for producing their hand-made soaps.

Whaley, a former Air Force linguist, loves the diversity

of the customers at the USDA's Indoor and Outdoor markets. "As a linguist, I am amazed at how many times I end up conversing with customers from countries all over the world." A veteran at the Outdoor market, he speaks highly about the USDA. "I thank the USDA's Transportation and Marketing Program for offering us vendors such a great location to sell our products. They really have done a great job sparking an interest in these markets! Our products have reached the masses; even the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior have been to my booth."

Union Street Soapworks can be found at a number of locations. For more information about this business, visit their Website at: www.unionstreetsoap.com.



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Theodore Pratt III,
Wild Mountain Honey

Theodore Pratt's Wild Mountain Honey brings honey that is produced in several Virginia locations to the Washington, D.C. area.

Four different honey spreads – cinnamon, raspberry, clover, and local wildflower – are available to be purchased in 12oz. glass jars. Different containers, including the traditional plastic honey bear or boxed honey comb, provide customers a number of options of raw honey. Pratt also boasts about being one of the few vendors who sells fresh bee pollen.

Pratt claims that honey is a great gift idea because it never goes bad. He tells his customers that honey lasts forever. Should the honey crystallize in the winter, just heat the entire jar in a double boiler. If the honey crystallizes in the summer, you can just leave the entire jar out in the sun. Pratt also sells some skin and body cream products that are made from beeswax.

A mainstay at the USDA Outdoor Farmers Market, Pratt

hopes to have the same success at the Indoor Market. He appreciates the support the Department has provided him. "They offer us tents in the summer and a nice location in the winter," says Pratt. He loves being a part of the community-based environment at the market. "I enjoy the relationship I have with the USDA. I especially like the Department's involvement with the D.C. Central Kitchen, giving us vendors an opportunity to give back to the community." Pratt speaks of an arrangement the USDA created, letting vendors donate food to the local non-profit chartered to reduce hunger, poverty, and homelessness.



Melissa Hopko,
So Very Special

So Very Special was one of the original vendors at the USDA Farmers Market. Alexandra and her

daughter, Melissa, credit the USDA for the diversification of their business. More than 30 years ago, the business primarily focused on selling herbs. However, as the Department started emphasizing value-added services, So Very Special decided it was important to branch out to produce other products, such as skin care products. Now the business sells a variety of products, including hand cream and 20 varieties of hand-crafted soap, to name a few.

Particular about the purity of her products, the Hopkos use their own herbs and other natural ingredients to make their products. Many tests are completed to make sure that their products are pure. When talking about her soaps, they emphasize that they don't contain animal products.

These vendors get satisfaction out of creating these natural products for their customers. "I love conversing with people at the market; it is a joy to see my customers satisfied with their products," Alexandra says. Firmly believing that natural products are good for the body, she is also a customer of her own products as she uses her company's beeswax-based foot cream while working at her other job as a tour guide.

As this company has been a part of the USDA Farmers Market since the beginning, Hopko has a unique understanding of the market and how it operates. "The market is great because each vendor can expose their customers to their own unique products. You will also find that vendors will look out for each other and tell customers about the benefits of their fellow vendors' products," Alexandra says. "I am thankful that the USDA has allowed us to operate in their market and that it gave us the impetus to expand the number of products we offer."

While the So Very Special Website is currently down, you can visit it in the future at:

www.soveryspecial@yola.com.





Tracy DeBernard,
C&T Produce

Craig and Tracy DeBernard are the owners of C&T Produce. The Fredericksburg-based company specializes in selling fruits, vegetables, and trees and other nursery products. More than 400 acres of farmland are dedicated to producing the products that are sold by this business.

C&T Produce spends a great deal of resources on fertilizer and fuel to help its crops grow. They also claim that a large part of their success relies on growing their crops on soil covered by plastic, which reduces the number of weeds that can harm their crops.

In the midst of cold weather, many often ask Tracy how she grows her produce in the winter. The answer is her company has two greenhouses that it devotes to grow

its fruits and vegetables when it is too cold to grow them outside. “We use fuel to heat the greenhouses through the cold winter nights,” she says. “With the weather we have encountered this winter, we have been pumping up the heat to make sure that we can deliver the same great products to our customers.”

DeBernard is pleased to be a member of the USDA Farmers Markets. While this is the first year C&T participated in the Winter Market, she has fond memories from the Outdoor Market. “We have developed a loyal customer base and really enjoy coming back to this market,” says DeBernard. “We put a lot of effort into producing beautiful crops and we love coming here to share them with our customers.”

More information about C&T Produce can be found on their Website at: www.candtproduce.com.



Pictured Above: Apples from C&T Produce



Carl Purvenas-Smith,
Terrapin Station Herb Farm

Carl Purvenas-Smith is another one of the original vendors at the USDA Outdoor Farmers Market. This farm, stationed in York Springs, Pa., specializes in producing naturally-grown fruits, vegetables, herbs, and much more.

When visiting the Terrapin Station Herb Farm’s booth, you will find a wide variety of products, ranging from apples to baked ginger snaps. They even bring a number of their 104 different marmalades and jellies to the market. However, if you really want to see all of the products they offer you must visit their Website. This site will show you all of their available products and is capable of arranging a delivery.

Terrapin Station is committed to sharing with its customers the importance of eating quality products. Purvenas-Smith stresses that his products do not contain high-fructose corn syrup.

When looking back at his years of being part of the USDA Farmers Market, Purvenas-Smith appreciates the community that has been created amongst the vendors. “The interesting thing about the market is that we really have an appreciation for each other. Over the years, you really get to know each other well and begin to feel as if you are part of a family,” he says.

For more information about Terrapin Station Farms visit their Website at: www.tsherbfarm.com.





Tania Cotrina,
Hondo Coffee

Arondo Holmes' Hondo Coffee brings coffee from Honduras to the Washington, D.C. area, importing its coffee from a 40 acre farm in Honduras directly to Baltimore, Md. The coffee is then roasted in Washington, D.C., so that it can be shared with customers.

A variety of natural flavors of Arabica coffee beans are hand-picked for the customer's delight. They also have a line of herbal coffees for those who are into herbal products. Holmes claims they produce their coffee the traditional way, using hoes, machetes, and shovels.

Hondo Coffee takes great pride in being involved with the communities they work in. The company takes part in a number of humanitarian aid dealings, including working in the local schools and hospitals. The company is a farm-direct company, which means that it encourages other companies to buy coffee directly from Honduran growers,

providing the growers higher wages. Holmes also pays his growers double the going wage rate in Honduras.

This is the second year that Hondo Coffee has participated in the USDA Indoor Market, while it has been a part of the Outdoor Market for three years. "The Farmers Market is excellent," Holmes says. "They really manage the market well. The USDA has created a great environment for the customers and vendors."

When visiting Hondo Coffee's booth, you will see either Holmes or Tonia Cotrina, another one of the company's employees. You can find out more information about Hondo Coffee at www.hondocoffee.com.



Brisela Rodriguez,
Grace's Pastries

Grace Banahene's Grace's Pastries produces baked goods that are made from scratch without using any preservatives. Customers can expect to find Brisela Rodriguez, an employee of the company, selling a variety of cakes, sweet breads, cookies, and other baked goods at each market.

Grace's Pastries is dedicated to providing her customers the best possible service. Banahene is proud to say they provide their customers the finest products. All of the ingredients used to make her products are bought in season from local farmers markets in the Northern Virginia area. Natural ingredients are used to make all of their products; they don't use flour that has been processed with artificial bleach. Lots of fruits are substituted for sugar to provide her goods the sweet taste customers are looking for in baked goods.

The company Website allows customers to make online purchases that can be picked up at the Herndon, Va., location, or delivered to addresses in the Northern Virginia/D.C. Metro area. Some items, including holiday cookies, can be delivered anywhere in the U.S. Banahene says that after tasting her baked goods many customers encourage other family members and friends to

order her products online. "Our products make great gifts -- you will not regret buying our baked goods," she says.

Social responsibility plays an important role in this company's operations. Banahene says they try to price their products so that they are affordable. Retail businesses can work with Banahene to get wholesale pricing for many of her baked goods. They also donate food to local homeless shelters throughout the D.C. Metro area.

A member of the USDA Winter Farmers Market for two years and the Outdoor Market for four years, Banahene says that she has had a great experience working with the USDA. "The market provides a great location to sell our products," she says. "As a vendor, you feel great because everyone comes out to support the market."

You can find out more information about Grace's Pastries by visiting their Website at: www.graces-pastries.com.





Paulette Peterson,
Calvert Kettle Corn

Paulette Peterson's Calvert Kettle Corn provides its customers that delicious taste that only comes from popping fresh kernels in a hot, open fired

kettle. This Calvert County, Md., company takes pride in using quality ingredients that often strike up fond memories of eating popcorn at the local carnival.

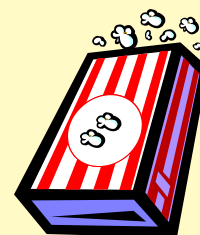
There are six locations in Calvert County where you can purchase their delicious kettle corn. Through their Website, anyone in North America can purchase their products online and have them delivered. They also sell different sized bags and tins of their popcorn as well. While it's not available at the USDA Winter Market, for only \$6 a refill, you can refill your bucket of popcorn at a number of locations when they are popping corn.

Their buckets and tins of kettle corn make great gifts!

During the holiday season, customers can go online and purchase large tubs of popcorn for family members and friends. There are many flavors for customers to choose from -- even one with Old Bay seasoning!

At the Outdoor Farmers Market, you can find Peterson's husband, Tom, turning the kettle corn himself in a gigantic kettle. A mainstay at the Outdoor Market, Calvert Kettle Corn is proud to be associated with the USDA. "They have given our products great visibility," Peterson says. Every time I walk through the cafeteria people recognize me as the popcorn lady. We have a great relationship with the USDA and I really appreciate that."

You can find out more information about Calvert Kettle Corn by visiting their Website at:
www.calvertkettlecorn.com.



You can even buy greens from C&T Produce at the Winter Market!



Calvert Kettle Corn offers a variety of flavored popcorn for their customers.



Baked goods from Grace's Pastries always make the perfect dessert.



Terrapin Station Herb Farms has a number of flavored jams for their customers.



A customer looks at the selection of meats available at Ole Pioneer's Kitchen.



Tracy DeBernard of C&T Produce shows off one of her door swags.



Nathan Whaley of Union Street Soapworks talks about his soap with a customer.



Tania Cotrina of Hondo Coffee hands a customer some of their Viennese cinnamon coffee.



Baked goods from Grace's Pastries are always a hit.



Salchicha sausage from Ole Pioneer's Kitchen.



Paulette Peterson of Calvert Kettle Corn discusses the different flavors of popcorn they carry.



Alexandra Hopko (left) and Melissa Hopko (right) of So Very Special tell a customer about the benefits of their skin creams.



A customer picks vegetables from C&T Produce.



Brisela Rodriguez of Grace's Pastries talks about one of her cakes.



Theodore Pratt of Wild Mountain Honey tells a customer what goes well with his honey products.



Carl Purvenas-Smith of Terrapin Station Herb Farms goes over the variety of products they offer.



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